Radical Fables for the Young Proletariat: FAIRY TALES FOR WORKERS' ...
By ALICE ZISKA
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FAIRY TALES FOR WORKERS' CHILDREN. By Herminia Zur Mühlen. Translated by Ida Dailes. Illustrated by Lydia Gibson. 66 pp. Chicago: The Daily Worker Publishing Company.

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BELIEVERS in the millennium never falter in their faith and their inexhaustible propaganda assumes strange and unexpected forms. Even the fairy tale is made to serve their proselyting purpose. But instead of the pearls and diamonds which fell from the lips of Grimm's heroine, words of bitter wisdom are spoken by the proletarian characters in these radical fables.

"Fairy Tales for Workers' Children," by Herminia Zur Mühlen, are translated from the German by Ida Dailes and illustrated by Lydia Gibson. The blood-red cover of the book is startling, but not half so much as the revolutionary text contained in the scant sixty-six pages. Here the Workers of the World have put their teachings into words of one syllable, so to speak. Even the youngest child may understand them and, understanding, absorb the doctrine that the world and all it holds belongs to the workers and not to the rich and powerful.

The book consists of four short tales, pregnant with warning of the coming of that day to which Russia has already given being. The author has little use for fearsome giants or grotesque goblins, for fairy princes or lovely maidens in distress. Her protagonists are the flowers, the birds, the four-footed creatures and the simple questioning soul of the child. Through them she teaches that to make the world a better place for the workers and their families to live in the people must learn to help one another and to present a united front of the bogy of capitalism.

The first story, "The Rose Bush," tells of a beautiful rose tree blooming happy and contented in a magnificent garden. One day the Wind pays her a visit. This boisterous, rough-mannered Bolshevik points out that she has no entity of her own, shows her that she belongs absolutely to the rich woman on whose land she stands and tells her that her rich owner has never done a stroke of work to entitle her to her possessions. Ergo, she has no right to them.

"The rich can buy everything" [he rages], "but not me. They can't capture and imprison me. I am the friend of the poor. I fly to all lands. In big cities I station myself before ill-smelling cellars and I roar into them: 'Freedom! Justice!'" To tired, overworked people I sing a lullaby. 'Be courageous, keep together, fight, you will conquer!' Then they feel new strength, they know that a comrade has spoken to them. The rich would like to imprison me because I carry the message, but I whistle at them. At night I rattle their windows so that they become frightened in their soft beds and then I cry: 'Ho, ho, you idlers, your time is coming. Make room for the workers of the world!'"

His arguments convert the Rose Bush to his views, and she determines that she will no longer be an idler. When the rich woman tries to pluck the roses, the bush, in a rage, hits her in the face with a twig. Then, stretching out her thorns, just as a cat stretches out its claws, she scratches her cheeks. After several ineffectual attempts to pick the flowers, the woman retires defeated; her dress in shreds, her hands torn and bleeding.

As part of her self-imposed penance, the Rose Bush decides to go on a hunger strike. But it takes all her courage to carry out her resolution. Her parched branches long for the cool water which the gardener brings her night and morning, but her roots steadfastly refuse to drink in the refreshing draught. During her hours of torture, the Wind is always there beside her, exhorting her to be brave so that she may conquer in the end.

To give herself strength to go on, she thinks of the useless cumberers in the big house behind her and contrasts their smug, self-satisfied faces with the wan features of the tired creatures she sees wearily dragging themselves along the street just beyond the garden.

One morning the gardener finds only a withered shrub where once the blooming rosetree stood. Sadly, he digs up the faded thing and is about to throw it on the rubbish heap when the bush, with just sufficient strength to whisper to him, begs the man to take her home with him. So, in his own poverty-stricken room, he repots the dead branches and lovingly tends and waters them. They revive, grow in beauty and fragrance and bring comfort and cheer to other poor and tired people. But, to the pale, half-starved children who come to enjoy the perfume of her flowers, the Rose Bush sings tenderly:

"When you are grown up, you will no longer stand sadly outside the rich man's gate. The whole world will belong to those who work!"

"The Sparrow" has for its theme discontent with existing conditions. The plebeian bird hero, suddenly grown class-conscious, nourishes a hatred against the feathered aristocrats who look down upon his family. He deserts the home nest, determined to find a land where every one is free and where there is sunshine and plenty. After numerous adventures he reaches Egypt, where he finds the Sphinx. She tells him that for thousands of years there have been slaves just as there are slaves today. But she prophesies the dawn of a day when "all slaves will arise in a dreadful struggle against their oppressors. After long bloody battles they will conquer and then there will be a new world where everything belongs to all people and all people are free."

Harriet Beecher Stowe's famous book evidently furnished the atmosphere for "The Little Grey Dog," which is an "Uncle Tom's Cabin" type of story. In it an outcast mongrel gives his life for a negro boy who has saved him from drowning.

The Rose Bush.